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# Timing is Everything: Toward a Better Understanding of Time and International Politics

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## Abstract

*What is time? And why does it matter to international politics? Despite evidence that time is central to political life, international-relations theories often taken it for granted. Important efforts to address such oversights critique influential disciplinary assumptions and expand our perspective on temporal experience. But they do not substantially deepen our understanding of time, let alone its relationship to politics. International-relations theory retains entrenched habits of thinking and speaking about time that isolate inquiry, constrain dialogue, and reify time as a stand-alone object detached from social relations and processes. This theory note therefore reconstructs international relations' temporal imagination. Instead of relying on pre-existing, static concepts of time, it develops a framework from the basic activity of timing: practical efforts to establish relationships between various changes according to a standard that enables orientation, direction, and control. Timing theory explains the political origins of time and the power of our most familiar ideas about it. It also resolves key problems attending other temporal research. Finally, it offers scholars more dynamic ways to analyze the temporal politics of important phenomena like war and identity. It thus highlights how, in both practice and theory, international politics is very much a matter of timing.*

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## Introduction

On March 17, 2014, just after an overwhelming and conspicuous majority in a popular referendum voted to reunite with Russia, the Crimean parliament announced it would jump local clocks ahead two hours to Moscow Standard Time. Amidst shadowy military clashes, questionable voting, and escalating displays of Russian and Ukrainian identity, lawmakers considered it vital to divorce Sevastopol's hours from Kiev's—to make Crimea more Russian by changing time zones. When this took effect, and 22:00 became midnight in a single second, the Crimean Prime Minister declared to a crowd full of Russian flags, "I greet you with our return home" (Baczynska 2014). Upon hearing this, the crowd burst into the Russian national anthem as Crimea quite literally re-timed itself to Moscow's rhythm and rule.

Such overt connections between time and international politics are nothing new. During World War I, military schedules assumed that there would be virtually no delay between mobilization and hostilities and so they made no allowances for turning armies away from the front. World War I became known as the "war by timetable" (see Hom 2010, 1166) and ended with an armistice signed around 5:00 in Paris, but delayed to take effect just over six hours later: at 11:11 on 11/11/19 (Oulahan 1919). With appalling symmetry, this act of timing produced 11,000 further casualties. Elsewhere, surprising events like the end of the Cold War, major terrorist attacks, or the Arab Spring signal that time itself is "out of joint": that the present is unstable, the future full of danger (see Weiner 2001; Stürmer 2016). Political actors also express temporal concerns, as when members of the United States Congress debating Syrian intervention worried that airstrikes would initiate a "sequence of events" of "great risk and great uncertainty" and the prospect of "a new open-ended war" (Khan 2013).

These examples illustrate the significance of time to the study and practice of international politics. We might therefore expect international-relations theorizing to focus on the temporal character of political processes, events, and institutions. But the field only pays sporadic attention to time. This overall neglect of the subject has, in turn, enabled ahistorical, overly spatial, and static (or 'timeless') accounts of dynamic phenomena.

This may be changing. Mainstream research typically identifies time only with clock and calendrical reckoning. But other, mainly critical, approaches seek to redress international

relations' "evasion of time" (Agathangelou and Killian 2016, 5) and to "open up the problematic of time" (Hesford and Diedrich 2010, 6) by highlighting a multiplicity of other political temporalities. These efforts substantially expand our disciplinary perspective on time. They show that international politics is not only intrinsically temporal but also temporally diverse.

Yet, I contend, international-relations scholarship has not substantially deepened our understanding of time itself, or its relationship to politics. Temporal analyses seldom engage with one another. Moreover, many of them manifest deeply embedded habits of speaking and thinking about time—ones that limit our ability to unpack its significance and analyze it rigorously. In particular, both mainstream and critical approaches marginalize dynamic processes and reify time as a static thing apart from social life. So even as international-relations theory begins to acknowledge time's importance to international politics, scholars rely on and reproduces meager theoretical instruments for making sense of time.

This theory note reconstructs international relations' temporal imagination. It argues that we should focus on *timing*: the practical efforts by which social agents establish meaningful relationships between processes of change so that they unfold in ways conducive to orientation, direction, and control. As the examples above suggest, timing processes are common to international politics. If repeated successfully, they may produce symbolic descriptions of a "time" or "temporality" that comes to seem "real" and independent of social existence. Yet this status stems not from any accurate description of an ontological prior, but rather from those symbols' ability to transmit useful information about orienting ourselves in dynamic environments. References to time, even those deemed "universal" or matters of common sense, thus primarily serve as markers of the underlying timing practices that give international politics its temporal character.

I make this argument by drawing on the work of Norbert Elias. I develop his insights into a dynamic, systematic, and political approach to time. By beginning with timing instead of time, this framework avoids or resolves the problems of current approaches, which tend to separate time from politics. It also sharpens critical challenges to dominant times while rendering those challenges more consistent with their own theoretical commitments. Finally, timing theory adds explanatory value to the wider field of international relations. It highlights overlooked, but important, factors in key topics, such as war and identity. In these ways,

timing theory reconfigures not only how we understand time in theory but also, more broadly, how we grapple with international politics in time.

The note first outlines how time matters in international-relations research and discusses limitations of the existing literature. In the next section, it constructs a theory of timing. The third section explains the advantages of this approach, including how it explains, on the one hand, the emergence of time from politics and, on the other hand, how it overturns conventional wisdom about time. The fourth section illustrates timing's wider explanatory power through examples from the Vietnam War and identity research. The conclusion links timing theory to other international-relations research and highlights important issues arising when we treat international politics as a matter of timing.

### **How time matters in the study of international relations**

Amidst a growing literature, we can discern three primary ways that time matters for international-relations theory.<sup>1</sup> First, mainstream scholars treat time as a *natural and neutral dimension* in which international politics occurs (Gaddis 1992, 38). If they specify this dimension, researchers measure time with clocks and Gregorian calendars. Causes-of-war studies construct observations and explanations from “the raw facts” of “nation-years” (Singer and Diehl 1990, 12–21). Time series analyses vary attributes over calendrical duration (see Box-Steffensmeier et al. 2014, 8). Event hazard models correlate this duration with outcome likelihoods (for example, Box-Steffensmeier and Jones 1997, 1414). Alternatively, conflict studies treat calendrical duration as a proxy variable or “intensity dimension” (Moore 2006, 7). These literatures do not reflect on the relatively recent historical emergence of such time-reckoning practices. They treat time as an obvious and obviously quantified feature of the wider world, rather than a concept developed to understand that world. Such customs structure the field more broadly: “the twenty years’ crisis,” watershed dates like 9/11, and citation practices all reinforce the dominance of clock and calendar time. These customs make it seem that “it still ‘really is’ [2018], regardless of what anyone chooses to call it” (see McIntosh 2015, 470). Research in this vein that takes time “seriously” primarily labors to solve technical challenges posed by diachronic data, such as variable dependence or serial correlation (Beck, Katz, and Tucker 1998, 1283–1284). So time matters

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<sup>1</sup> These non-exhaustive and idealized divisions highlight shared themes and important distinctions between diverse works (see Jackson 2011, 37).

only inasmuch as it serves conventional modes of inference (Box-Steffensmeier et al. 2014, 22–26) enabling generalization and prediction (see McIntosh 2015, 475–79).

Second, alongside clock and calendar time, international relations reflects an older tradition treating time as *a problem requiring a solution*. By its very essence, time's passage brings dissolution, discord, and death (Bryson 2007, 9; Stevens 2015, 43). It is a cruel god, destabilizing force, or “universal devourer” (Ovid 2004, 605; see Brandon 1965, 31–64; Gunnell 1987, 12–16). Especially during periods of uncertainty, international-relations scholars tap into these themes (see Hom 2016, 170–71), despairing of the natural “vicissitudes and hazards of time” left unchecked by sound knowledge or stable practices (Niebuhr 2008, 85; Anderson 2011, 3). More generally, they perceive time as naturally antagonistic to democracy (Scheuerman 2004, xiii–xv), institutional efficiency (see Hanrieder 2015, 3), and reliable causal inference (Box-Steffensmeier 2014 et al. 2014, 25–26). So time also matters as an intrinsic challenge to international political practice and theory.

Third, recent works challenge clock and calendar time and its links to statist worldviews. Critical scholars chart temporal diversity in politics and advocate *time pluralism* or “heterotemporality” in theory (Blaney and Inayatullah 2010, 186; Çalkıvık 2016, 238; Hutchings 2008, 160–76; Klinke 2013, 681–85; Lundborg 2011, 192; Stephens 2010, 34; Vij 2012, 9). Many oppose the “linear time” of the clock and state with alternative concepts of time: “savage” or indigenous (Blaney and Inayatullah 2010, 190; Nanibush 2016, 105–07; Shaw 2008, 62), “private” and “women’s” (Kristeva, Jardine, and Blake 1981; Bryson 2007, 121–44; see Glucksmann 1998, 242–43 and 251–53), embodied presence (Gallagher 2012, 76–77), traumatic (Edkins 2003, 29–41; Ferreira and Marcelino 2011, 136), cyclical (Shaw 2008, 110), “cross-stitched” (Solomon 2014, 671–74), and “traces” and micropolitical “immediacy” (Shapiro 2010, 39–42; Stephens 2010, 34).<sup>2</sup> Others criticize how various theorists combine *chronos* (homogeneous flow) and *kairos* (moments of opportunity) to produce totalizing accounts of political time. Instead, these critics champion the potential of *aion* (virtual time) to recover political possibility from sovereign historical logics (Hutchings 2008, 69; Lundborg 2011, 21). Taken together, these efforts direct attention away from hegemonic statist times toward the marginalized, oppressed, and otherwise forgotten times of

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<sup>2</sup> For overviews, see Hom and Steele (2010, 274–78); Stevens (2015, 36–41); Walker (1993, 1–14).

global politics. They argue compellingly that time matters more – and in more ways – than conventional international-relations research allows.

*What's the matter with time in the study of international relations?*

Thanks to these critical efforts, international-relations theory now possesses a much more expansive view of time. However, this vantage exposes three overriding problems. First, mainstream scholars working with time and critical scholars working on time do not speak much to each other. Relatedly, both groups habitually invoke the problem of time without unpacking or connecting it to other temporalities. The three ways that time matters, then, work like “stovepipes”, or particular knowledge channels isolated from one another. Stovepiping also occurs *within* critical international relations, where scholars show little interest in comparing or connecting their proliferating concepts of time to one another.

Second, our discourse of time remains descriptive and parochial. International-relations research employs unexplained master concepts of time and qualifies these with unexplicated predicates. In terms of master concepts, in addition to clock and calendar time, scholars lean heavily on linear versus cyclical binaries (for example, Edkins 2003; Gallagher 2012; Hom and Steele 2010; Shaw 2008). Others develop Deleuzean adaptations of classical Greek thought into the aforementioned triad of *chronos*, *kairos*, and *aion* (Hutchings 2008, 154-77).<sup>3</sup> But none explain where these concepts originate or authorize the use of one instead of another, except by intuition or veneration. The field’s master concepts of time either make obvious sense or hark back to august thinkers. Both instances give the illusion of simply “nam[ing]” or “giv[ing] meaning to what is ‘out there’” (Berenskoetter 2017, 152; see also Guzzini 2013).<sup>4</sup> They do not, however, explain “how time emerges and flows” (Blaney and Inayatullah 2010, 199; see also McIntosh 2015, 469, 485).

Alternatively, scholars use creative but largely intuitive predicates to qualify “time” and “temporality”. Scholars invoke “temporal borders” (Lundborg 2016, 103-04; Walker 2009, 31–35), “military techno-scientific time” (Gallagher 2012, 77), “now-time” and “city time” (Stephens 2010, 36, 42), or “timeless time” (Blaney and Inayatullah 2010, 190). One innovative cinematic analysis deploys “impossible,” “mobile,” “plastic,” and “critical” temporalities; “heterogeneous temporal association,” “temporal play,” the “event time” of

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<sup>3</sup> Lundborg (2011, 16) uses *chronos* and *aion* but not *kairos*.

<sup>4</sup> Stevens (2015, 45–49) offers a rare exception.

bomb blasts, the “microtemporality” of intimacy, the “temporal trajectory for ... moral damage,” and “documentary time” in a single chapter, with little to no explication (Shapiro 2016, 36-52). The issue here is *not* temporal variety or creativity, but the absence of systematic elaboration or “predicate analyses” showing why these qualifiers ‘stick’ and “construct the thing(s) named as a particular sort of thing, with particular features and capacities” (Milliken 1999, 232). Indeed, the “temporal turn” (Berenskoetter 2011, 664) in critical international-relations theory works primarily through common-sense formulations. Intuitive concepts are useful but they also isolate a discursive community, obscure its broader symbolic order, and dilute its value to wider audiences.

Third, efforts to understand time inadvertently end up reifying and obscuring their analytical objects. Critical scholars assert the contingent, socially constructed nature of time and criticize presumptive “ideas about some abstract unity” (Lundborg 2009; see also Edkins 2003, 12; Hutchings 2008, 5; McIntosh 2015, 478; Solomon 2014, 671). Yet the way they discuss and theorize it reproduces a temporal imagination composed of natural, objective, or “thingy” entities possessing immutable essences and standing apart from human activity. For example, work deploying *chronos*, *kairos*, and *aion* slips from intersubjective temporal constructions into conflicts between free-standing times. It calls *kairos* a “creative force in its own right” that “intervenes” in *chronos*, which is “inscribed in the universe as a whole” (Hutchings 2008, 25 n.5, 31). It discusses how “time itself is captured by history” (Lundborg 2011, 111–12). It claims that radical *aion* marks the “eternal truth of time: pure empty form of time” (Hutchings 2008, 69). These remarks grant time a set of intrinsic and independent attributes divorced from human initiative.

International-relations research broadly reflects this orientation to time “as an abstract historical actor” or “natural phenomenon with an essential nature” (Dudziak 2012, 3–4). Scholars proceed as if “time passes, irrespective of human desires and interventions” (Stevens 2015, 43–44). They insist that we respect “the fact that the passage of time, in and of itself, also shapes events” (Gaddis 1992, 38). Combined with the tendency to qualify it with intuitive predicates, these approaches reify and embed time as a pre-constituted object of knowledge—part of that “enigmatic treasure of ‘things’ anterior to discourse” (Foucault, quoted in Onuf 2012, 33). So even as scholars experiment with new ideas about time, they further entrench conventional habits treating time as innate, immutable, and mysterious (see McIntosh 2015, 470; Stevens 2015, 42–44). This highlights a theoretical disposition to



treating time as part of a “static” (Guzzini 2013, 534) or “substantialist” ontology of fixed entities (Jackson and Nexon 1999, 293–95). This disposition comports with some international-relations approaches but not with critical commitments to contingency and process (Edkins 2003, xiv–xv; Hutchings 2008, 30; see Jackson and Nexon 1999, 292). It also burnishes the ontological credentials of clock and calendar time, whose reliability and stability seem more “real” than other temporalities when assessed against criteria of stability and substantialness.

Together these issues hamper research and undersell time’s importance. They strand international-relations scholars between a presumptive reliance on clock time, chronic but unreflective evocations of the problem of time, and a growing but woolly catalogue of alternative temporalities that inadvertently reaffirm a temporal hierarchy privileging the clock and calendar. This situation pervades the field and highlights the need for a different temporal vocabulary and theoretical approach, one that can complement and extend such efforts without reinforcing their shared tensions. In addition to a broader perspective on time, we need better theoretical leverage—a more rigorous and systematic means of analyzing it. This requires a deeper understanding of the basic processes that enable us to speak of time at all (see Lynch 2014, 42).<sup>5</sup>

### **A matter of timing**

A straightforward but powerful shift provides a way forward. It involves moving from concepts and predicates of time to the dynamic, practical activity of *timing*. This approach draws on the sociologist Norbert Elias (1984, 111; 2007), who sought to analyze time as a theoretical and empirical puzzle rather than a philosophical enigma or physical entity. His approach reflects broader interests in process-relationalism (see Abbott 2001, 124; Jackson and Nexon 1999, 291–92; McCourt 2016, 475–76), and as such overlaps with well-known theories of time in that tradition. These include Bergson’s (1912, 55–56) account of experiential duration, Heidegger’s (2002, 12–20) formulation of pure occurrence from relations of appropriation, Whitehead’s (2004, 55, 34–35) interest in simultaneity amidst the ceaseless “passage of nature,” and Mead’s (2002, 73, 100–05) and James’ (see Andersen

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<sup>5</sup> While embracing heterotemporality, I worry that absent elaboration, comparison, and dialogue, we risk blunting the temporal turn’s critical edge. Without such clarifications, incommensurability – the lack of a common measure – looks like full-blown incompatibility – the impossibility of being grasped together. This would call various times’ nominal affiliations into question. Temporal diversity makes systematic attention more important.

2014) accounts of the “specious” present constituted from emergence, novelty, and adjustment.

However, there are good reasons to focus on Elias’ account of timing. Despite these theorists’ shared commitments to processes and relations, only Elias makes the dynamic verb “timing” a theoretical centerpiece. He does so precisely “to avoid [the] illusion” of time as a free-standing entity (Elias 2007, 38). Other process-relational accounts work primarily with substantival nouns like duration, occurrence, simultaneity, and the present. This leaves them vulnerable to problems of reification and objectification.<sup>6</sup> While all share affinities with timing and some nearly acknowledge it (for example, Whitehead 2004, 33–48), none explicitly features timing, as Elias does.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, this section develops his ideas about timing into a more robust theoretical framework tailored for international-relations analysis.

Elias (2007, 38–39) grounds timing in humans’ basic capacities for making connections: “the word ‘time’ ... is a symbol of a relationship that a human group – that is, a group of beings biologically endowed with the capacity for memory and synthesis – establishes between two or more continua of change, one of which is used by it as a frame of reference or standard of measurement for the other (or others).” Timing standards help us integrate and coordinate otherwise discordant phenomena into an intelligible whole supporting orientation, direction, and control (Elias 2007, 43–44). For example, clocks produce consistent, enumerated intervals. We use these to relate happenings (“the first bomb went off at 2:49 pm”) and quantify the extent of experiences (“two explosions ripped through the sidelines of the race, 12 seconds ... apart” and led to “102 hours in pursuit of Marathon suspects,” *Globe Staff* 2013). Elias’ (2007, 84) examples of timing standards include physical continua like celestial motion, seasonal variation, and other reliable or repetitive processes.

How well this synthesis works determines whether timing proceeds actively or passively. Active timing requires conscious effort and remains open to contestation (Elias 2007, 41–42). It includes successful timing not yet ingrained as “second nature” or novel attempts to “redirect” the course of events, and may showcase a timing agent who proposes its standard

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<sup>6</sup> Additionally, a full synthesis, comparing and translating these theories and detailing their implications for international-relations theorizing, exceeds this note’s remit.

<sup>7</sup> “Timing” does not occur in any works mentioned here, nor does it occur in international-relations work like Berenskoetter (2011); Solomon (2014); or Walker (1993). It appears incidentally in Hom (2010, 1156, 1166); Hom and Steele (2010, 277); Hutchings (2008, 30–31); Lundborg (2011, 15); McIntosh (2015, 472, 479), and enigmatically in Walker (2009, 131, 198, 252).

of synthesis. Passive timing requires little effort and “no decision” (Elias 2007, 43) – we have memorized and absorbed its operations and so conduct them subconsciously. Once again, clock-based timing exemplifies this. It has become second nature because people learn its standard easily and apply this widely, because industrialization made clocks cheaply available, and because imperialism, globalization, and war spread its rule around the world (see Hom 2010, 1153–70).

Language provides the pivot by which timing explains “how time emerges or flows.” Symbolic discourse has a “figural” inclination toward “reifying substantives” rather than dynamic relations (Elias 2007, 35). Because timing deals with the latter, we find it easier to discuss using a “hypostatized” noun, *time*, whose attributes and predicates derive from the properties of the timing process (Elias 2007, 43, 61). Language’s “substantial” capacity thereby transmits learned knowledge about timing attempts, helping us avoid beginning anew but also objectifying and naturalizing “time” in the process of transmission (Elias 2007, 54, 36). At the limit, our discourse evinces a “fetish-character”, encouraging such a comprehensive “process reduction” of timing as to make the noun “time” appear “self-explanatory to people who have grown up with such language” (Elias 2007, 61). This obscures time’s verbal origin in timing and helps it pass as an independent entity.

Whenever we encounter temporal references, then, we should treat them as *timing indexicals*—opportunities to discover underlying efforts to synthesize dynamic relations. “The end of history” (Fukuyama 2006) reflects no actual cessation of events. Rather, it communicates teleological hopes that recent events fulfilled the purposeful logic of international politics, which will now stabilize and endure. Revolutionaries proclaiming the “dawn of a new era” identify no natural breakpoint. Rather they propose to comprehensively re-time society by shifting responsibility from themselves to the seemingly independent dynamics of time. Think of the French Revolution’s Year One in 1792, or the Khmer Rouge’s Year Zero in 1975, both of which operationalized revolutionary timing programs through original calendars.

### *The politics in timing*

Timing thus offers a more dynamic way to study temporal phenomena. Yet for all its innovation, Elias’ account remains skeletal and abstract. To bridge timing theory with

international-relations theorizing, we need to extend his ideas and elaborate their political aspects.

First, a timing standard need not be natural or consistent. Narratives configure actors and situations by an unfolding *gestalt* (Carr 1986, 41–42); visions “pull the actor toward the future” (Berenskoetter 2011, 663); and even idiosyncratic routines imbue daily life with stability and normalcy (Steele 2008, 3).<sup>8</sup> These ideographical examples all still work as timing standard because they offer some rule for establishing relations between dynamic continua. This accommodates a much wider range of phenomena as timing processes.

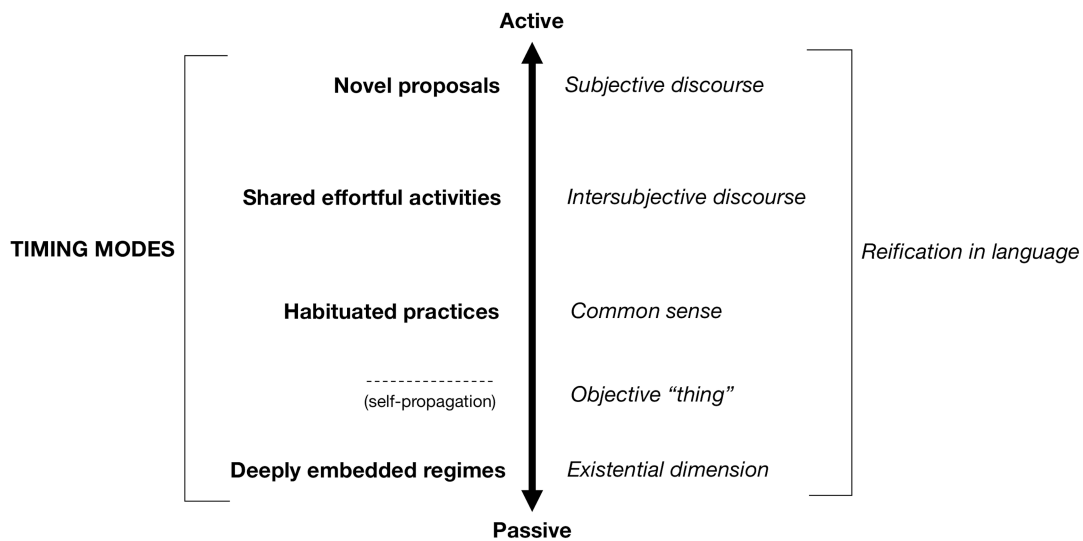
Second, we can sketch a spectrum running from active to passive timing (see Figure 1, p. 000). Key points include wholly unprecedented timing proposals, shared but effortful timing activities, habituated timing practices, and deeply embedded, passive timing regimes. For active timing to become more passive, it must confer increasing benefits of orientation, coordination, and control via the efficient transmission of working knowledge (Elias 2007, 10). If it does, it may outlive its original purpose, becoming a *self-propagating* or “unowned process” (Jackson and Nexon 1999, 302) residing solely in the synthetic relations it routinizes and thereby seeming more natural.

However, this spectrum is inherently unstable. Neither passive nor active timing ever ends conclusively. As dynamic processes, they remain provisional and occasionally fraught. In particular, novel changes pose timing challenges that may cause us to shift from passive to active timing to restore or completely reconfigure social relations.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, references to the “fullness of time,” “end of history,” or some unassailable dimension have no absolute or proper content. Temporal utterances refer only to a host of ongoing active and passive timing efforts.

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<sup>8</sup> For an extensive discussion of narrative timing, see Hom (n.d.).

<sup>9</sup> For how security politics manifests this passive-active timing shift, see Hom (2016, 169, 177–78).



*Figure 1*

Third, substantival discourse serves an institutionalizing function. It helps successful timing modes become more passive and perhaps self-propagating by embedding their hypostatized symbols in discourse. It can thereby *vivify* time, subsuming a timing mode within a figural “time” endowed with agency and potency – as in the traditional problem of time as an overwhelming force or angry god.

These extensions of timing hold important political implications (see Figure 2, p. 000). Take the aforementioned timing standards of clockwork motion, narrative themes, and future visions, which integrate discordant phenomena. The clock pervades modern life, stories confront heroes with villains, and visions lead us into unexpected encounters. To establish these non-spontaneous relations, timing *imposes* connections. If changes coordinated naturally, creative synthesis would be unnecessary—we would not need to time. But in situations lacking such coordination, timing depends on either “the readiness of [a] plurality to submit to an integrating authority” (Elias 2007, 136) or that authority’s ability to enforce its timing proposal. Put differently, timing establishes relations by realizing some “will to power” (Nietzsche 1982, 225–28) or, better, a *will to time*. It marks a creative effort to turn a dynamic welter into a coherent situation, to unfold a meaningful world within the flux of experience. Therefore, “time” not only symbolizes relational processes, it also instantiates, communicates, and embeds a temporal politics.

Finally, timing is *positional*: “people of a particular reference group” (Elias 2007, 61) undertake timing efforts that reflect their distinctive relationship to the wider world. In critical parlance, timing – like theory (Cox 1981, 128) – always works for someone and some purpose. As it becomes self-propagating and deeply ingrained, timing turns imperial, bringing more and more groups under its standard. Critical discussions of “hegemonic” times allude to this. Yet because timing is intrinsically provisional and non-exhaustive, *every* temporal reference—whether dominant or dissident, general or idiosyncratic—reflects a position and a will to time that privileges *and* marginalizes, elevates *and* subordinates agents and processes at the same “time”.

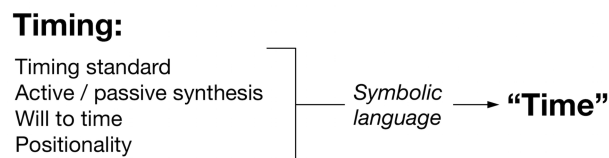


Figure 2

### Why timing matters

Timing theory confers important benefits to international-relations scholars engaging with time. In addition to foregrounding process in discussions of intrinsically dynamic phenomena, it resolves issues of reification, master concepts, and stovepiping. Scholars working with predicated time and temporality effectively begin their story in the middle and work toward the end by layering up abstraction and complexity. This locks in time as a stand-alone entity, leaving us ensconced *within* the very symbolic discourse that conceals its roots. By contrast, timing theory locates time and temporality not as “ontological primitives” (Jackson and Nexon 1999, 291–92, 318) but as timing *outcomes*. We start from the beginning, when dynamic relation-building efforts meet some instrumental need and produce a time or temporality only by succeeding enough to stimulate intersubjective discourse. This historicizes every temporal reference, highlights our choice to treat such references as “analytically autonomous,” and inhibits our tendency to conflate this choice with an independent existence (Jackson and Nexon 1999, 295). By resisting reification, timing theory also sharpens challenges to hegemonic time. Instead of deploying purportedly critical

concepts of time that inadvertently reaffirm clock or state time as more real, timing theory makes a strong claim for timing all the way down: *every* time and temporality contains a practical and conceptual history based exclusively in contingent and provisional efforts to establish relations between dynamic changes.

Timing theory further enables scholars to explain the prevalence of master concepts and intuitive predicates as an effect of their practical value for transmitting knowledge about underlying relational processes. The power of linear and cyclical times does not stem from anything natural or innate. Rather, it reflects their metaphorical capacity, passed down over generations, to quickly and effectively communicate timing methods. Nor must we accept that *chronos* describes a universal time, *kairos* a spontaneous moment of opportunity, or *aion* any eternal truth. Instead, these ideas index basic timing issues. *Aion* signifies a situation *in need* of timing and *full* of possibilities – a dynamic bramble open to different modes of synthesis. The chosen mode enables *kairotic*, active timing, which, if widely repeated, may become a more passive, *chronotic* regime eventually conflated with time *per se* until some novel change exposes different, *aionic* possibilities.

Timing theory also helps us avoid stovepiping. It allows us to scrutinize the common constituents of various times: their timing standard, the active or passive qualities of their modes of synthesis, what will to time they reflect, their positionality, and how symbolic language transmits and subsumes all of these (see Figure 2, p. 000). It is a theoretical problem that international-relations scholars neglect this sort of systematic approach to time. Their oversight reinforces the sense of time as naturally enigmatic and establishes the description of temporal variety as the upper limits of analysis. It is also a phenomenological problem. By reifying stovepipes scholars make it seem as if the world *just is* full of incompatible times that may constrain and isolate different social groups – as when modern imaginaries assign indigenous tribes a place “out of time” (see Blaney and Inayatullah 2010, 17; Nanibush 2016, 106). From the vantage of timing theory, this conclusion looks premature at best. We might instead read temporal variation as different ways of grappling with shared functional challenges. We might also view social agents as enmeshed in multiple, layered, and interpenetrating timing efforts. Depending on positionality and political power, different timing modes wax and wane. In some instances individuals or groups set their own standards, but in others hegemonic timing regimes like the unilinear-progressive pull of development benchmarks predominate (Blaney and Inayatullah 2010, 190–91). Either way, no one ever

stands “outside time” as such. Just the opposite, *we are always timing and being timed*—usually in multiple ways. Scholars can and should elaborate this. We might begin by charting various times but we should also take further steps to explain why the same group adopts or submits to different timing regimes, how one regime supplants another, or why certain timing modes adhere to geographical, anthropological, gender, and other political distinctions.

### *Explaining the times of international-relations theory*

Consider our three primary ways that time matters. Behind the clock’s “real” time we find neither eternal motion nor neutral medium but rather a modern political achievement. Clock time sprang from multigenerational efforts to integrate and coordinate various groups and processes by increasingly reliable mechanical motion (see Hom 2010, 1153–65). This resulted in a widely applicable timing regime reflecting the operational value of quantification and repetition (Elias 2007, 39). Clock timing encourages self-propagation, passive institutionalization, and ultimately arch-reification in symbolic language. It dominates contemporary life and consequently gets apprehended as time *per se*.

This explanation holds important implications for *any* time deemed more real than others. Where critical approaches distinguish *temporal* experience from objective *time* (for example, Lundborg 2016, 101; Solomon 2014, 674 n.4; for contrast see Hutchings 2008, 5),<sup>10</sup> timing theory offers a stronger critical option. It denies any “real” time’s ontological superiority *by providing a sociopolitical explanation* for its ascendance. Objective times spring from the same sources as subjective temporalities: practical and contingent timing efforts. They only come to seem “objective” by virtue of institutionalization, self-propagation, and symbolic reification. And yet precisely because they are neither given nor natural, hegemonic times also mark *timing achievements*—the ascendance of some will to time and mode of synthesis over others and the voluntary or forced submission of an especially large plurality. By injecting sociopolitical elements into previously unassailable times, timing theory upends a longstanding conceptual hierarchy. It historicizes and indeed politicizes those times often thought beyond human experience without obviating their theoretical or practical value.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Although meant to legitimate subjective experience, this move follows philosophy in reaffirming a “time” beyond mere temporal experience, which reinforces our dominant symbolic order.

<sup>11</sup> This does not mean we can simply change time by describing it differently. “Time” and its predicates transmit effective timing knowledge, so shared meanings and practical demands confront efforts to challenge or get outside a dominant timing mode. In international relations “time” often reflects large-scale social projects, which amplify these linguistic constraints.



Or take the problem of time. Much as we speak of “time passing” when timing proceeds so passively that our life and environment seem utterly congruous (Elias 2007, 61),<sup>12</sup> we also say that time “devours” or “threatens us.” The difference is that problematic symbols of time characterize timing *challenges* (Elias 2007, 35–36). We derive the attributes of these symbols from dynamic environments highly resistant to synthetic relations. Referencing time as a problem announces a failed or failing timing project (Elias 2007, 109, 43), creating a temporal entity and blaming it for incoherent or de-cohering relational processes.

Early complex societies depended on agriculture, tax collection, religious rites, and other large-scale coordination efforts (Elias 2007, 21–22, 48). These massive, active timing projects proved exceedingly challenging. Not surprisingly, the problem of time emerged early in those societies’ symbolic systems (Brandon 1965, 39–46; Gunnell 1987, 14). Once discursively embedded, the problem of time offers us a way to subsume confounding experiences with timing.<sup>13</sup> It thereby communicates the basic truth that survival depends upon contingent and provisional acts of timing. This explains the otherwise paradoxical relationship between the problem of time and less threatening “concepts of *time* and history, [by which] man gains control over ... ‘*time*’ in the sense of flux” (Gunnell 1987, 23, emphasis added). When timing proves difficult, we *characterize* time as a problematic force and propose solutions through manageable, passive abstractions conducive to successful timing.

Finally, take heterotemporality. Along with facilitating a more systematic account of temporal variety, timing theory places heterotemporality on firmer empirical footing: if everyone times in one way or another, if every time symbolizes a timing mode, and if we take seriously the temporal variation critical scholars identify, then time as such is *baseline heterotemporal*. Consequently, hegemonic, unitary variants like clock time mark *deviations* from the norm. This point moves beyond other critical approaches, which eschew talk of time *per se* because this suggests some presupposed, unitary time (Hutchings 2008, 4; Lundborg 2009; Shapiro 2016, 50). In timing theory, however, when we speak of “time as such” this implies no spurious unity but instead a *totality-in-multiplicity* of all the timing practices that humans undertake. We cannot reduce time as such to any philosophically or conceptually

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<sup>12</sup> Elias (2007, 36) notes that “time passing” works like “river flowing” or “wind blowing”—subject and predicate refer to the same process.

<sup>13</sup> Because timing never ends, the problem of time persists even as successful timing produces tame abstractions of “time.”

unitary account because this would possess no content—it would not reference a comprehensive and conclusive timing practice. This repositions heterotemporality as not only a critical resource but also a criterion of social-scientific adequacy: international-relations scholars must accommodate or at least acknowledge a multitude of timing practices; those presumptively employing clock and calendar time or statist historical frames must *justify their choice* to delimit temporal factors and then reflect on its explanatory and political implications (see McIntosh 2015, 476–83).

### *The power of timing theory*

To be clear, timing theory lodges a *competitive* claim against other temporal approaches. It proffers a means of speaking and thinking more suitable for temporal analysis than extant alternatives, which remain inside their phenomena of interest in ways that obscure deeper understanding. It avoids reproducing distinctions between objective time and subjective temporality as well as the problematic tendencies of both mainstream and critical discourses. It coherently elaborates and connects the ways that time matters in international-relations research where other approaches cannot. And it offers a more thoroughgoing critical approach to time. Put differently, timing theory “liberates” mainstream and critical scholars from “the limits of [their own] representation” (Lundborg 2009).

Understood heuristically, timing theory also achieves superior explanatory value. A heuristic framework develops “thematic” content that suggests empirical focus, shapes inquiry, and guides explanations (Humphreys 2011, 258). It aims not for testable hypotheses but to organize inquiry “systematically, structure questions and establish a coherent and rigorous set of interrelated concepts and categories” (Buzan 2010, 24). Its explanatory payoff consists not of causal laws or predictable generalizations but the pragmatic benefits of a more useful ordering of experience (Jackson 2011, 124).

Timing theory offers a thematic account of how times and temporalities emerge from practical processes via symbolic discourse. Timing indexicals direct our empirical focus, while the timing standard, the will to time, positionality, and distinctions between active and passive timing further shape our inquiry. These elements guide the questions we ask and therefore the explanations we develop: What knowledge of practical efforts to establish dynamic relations does “time” or “temporality” transmit? Does its underlying timing mode proceed more actively or passively? Who or what purpose does it serve? By what standard

and means of synthesis does it achieve orientation, direction, and control? How does it accommodate novel change? How does it compare and compete with other timing efforts? Taken together, these themes and questions organize temporal inquiry systematically and rigorously and thus facilitate a more useful ordering of temporal experience that is also more straightforward than other approaches (Elias 1984, 111).

### **Timing theory and international relations**

Beyond clarifying scholars' engagements with time, timing theory can add value to core areas of international-relations research, like war and identity. Although references to "times of war" date back at least to the Torah (see Eccl. 3:1), research on war largely overlooks temporal issues (although see Dudziak 2012; McIntosh 2015, 478-83).<sup>14</sup> Yet the prevalence of timing indexicals like "wartime" and the "chaos" of war suggest that timing matters in war more than we realize.

"Wartime" indicates an attempt to synthesize political relations by violent means. It emerges when belligerents actively try to direct and control each other according to mutually incompatible timing standards. What ideas provide these competing *wartiming* standards? Consider victory, the highly contested end states that belligerents seek.<sup>15</sup> Notions of victory specify outcomes and indicate how they might unfold from extant situations. They thus construct a rationale for initiating war, a guide to prosecuting it, and a benchmark for concluding and assessing it.

How does timing constitute war and help explain its outcome? In the case of the Vietnam War, timing clashes were crucial. It exemplified a war fought "*with* time, ... time itself [w]as a strategic asset ... the 'ultimate weapon' of the Revolution, as well as the 'final guarantor of victory'" (Nguyen 2008, 377).<sup>16</sup> American war planners assumed that the National Liberation Front (NLF) could not weather an extended conflict, either economically or militarily. However, the NLF prolonged the war and weakened American resolve by creatively *retiming* the social relations of its personnel. It adapted "free" or "leisure time"—long the domain of community events and religious rites—to the needs of small fighting units of young men

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<sup>14</sup> Long-cycles research seems an exception but falls in our first category of how time matters, treating time as a freestanding dimension along which power fluctuates (for example, Goldstein 1988, 7).

<sup>15</sup> Conspicuously, war studies also overlooks the meaning of victory (see O'Driscoll 2015, 808–10), despite its signal importance.

<sup>16</sup> I thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this example.

newly separated from their communities and families. ““The lives of the Revolution’s soldiers *intertwined constantly*, and as a *total experience* the army *involved as many of their needs as was possible*”” through a “comprehensive procedure of social reprogramming ... designed to transform the ‘*entire pattern*’ of behavior of the new recruit” (Nguyen 2008, 385–86, emphasis added). This reflected a “complete *reorientation* of individual aims and objectives ... toward the achievement of military, administrative, and political ‘competence’” (Nguyen 2008, 391, emphasis added). Reprogramming covered cooking, military drill, education, administrative training, and extensive self-criticism sessions. The latter, *kiểm thảo*, suspended “the ‘reality’ of class and kinship,” allowing small groups to engage as equals in reflexive dialogue (Nguyen 2008, 389). These new activities constituted fighting units as “artificial families” and imbued them with the egalitarian, communist principles the NLF expected to implement after the war (Nguyen 2008, 385). The revolution trained its soldiers to live as if they had already won.

A strategic NLF priority, then, was to establish a radically different timing regime reflecting its vision of victory. The *kiểm thảo* in particular clarifies timing’s value. It “reorganiz[ed]” community and kinship practices toward “the construction of ‘*situations*,’ in which *passive* subjects and spectators transformed into participants”, who established “an ‘artificial’ set of *relations*” constitutive of unit cohesion and revolutionary identity (Nguyen 2008, 393, emphasis added). The way the *kiểm thảo* unfolded as part of the NLF’s daily rhythms exemplifies thematic hallmarks of timing. It arose from the NLF’s will to time revolutionary life differently—to establish new “rules of conduct and behavior”—and it “suspend[ed] and suppress[ed]” alternatives for the sake of social direction and control (Nguyen 2008, 384–85). These new procedures produced better unit cohesion by prescribing lengthy activity chains in between brief periods of combat. This allowed the NLF to retard its operational pace. A protracted conflict confounded American leaders’ expectations and desires for a quick war and inhibited public support.

The Vietnam War developed as a timing contest. On one side, a capitalist, democratic superpower whose war effort depended on consumption, surplus, and public support—all of which favored a quick outcome achieved through the constant application of dominant force (Nguyen 2008, 376–77). On the other, a revolutionary insurgency advantaged primarily in population, which comprehensively *re-timed* the lives of its personnel toward the rhythms of

a drawn-out war designed to sidestep America's military dominance and sap its political will. The NLF's mode of wartiming comported with its environmental and strategic constraints as well as its vision of victory. US wartiming, designed primarily for large-scale armored clashes in central Europe, did not.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, how does wartiming accommodate novel change? All too well if we want to limit war. American leaders possessed fluid notions about victory in the Vietnam war. This ambiguity allowed the US military to "float" measures of success using opportunistic data like body counts rather than indicators derived from a coherent strategic vision (Daddis 2011, 7). As facts on the ground evolved, so did America's wartiming standard. It moved from propping up a 'domino' to pursuing 'peace with honor'. Such flexible standards made it increasingly difficult to withdraw from an intervention turned quagmire. Three decades later, American commitments to "enduring freedom" foundered in the failed interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Meanwhile, counterterrorism wars persist via *ad hoc* commitments to "degrade and destroy" or "bomb the hell out of" new actors sprung from the ruins of old failures. The war on terror never included an intelligible definition of victory that could provide an effective standard for initiating, conducting, and concluding military engagements. Meanwhile, evolving security logics and technologies offer increasingly adaptive modes of violent synthesis. Together these help counterterrorism war become a self-propagating political timing practice, transforming discrete moments of terror into a continuous 'time of peril' defined by mission creep and a continuous war footing. By foregrounding the causal importance of victory and timing modes, timing extends our theoretical horizon of war. In cases like Vietnam, it raises the additional possibility of analyzing war itself as a timing contest.

Timing theory can also extend identity research. Consider works that emphasize how selfhood emerges "in" and must be secured "through" or "over time" (for example, Berenskoetter 2011, 648; Solomon 2014, 671; Steele 2008, 56–64). Ontological security

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<sup>17</sup> Nguyen does not discuss timing *per se*, although comments about the "quality" and "form" of NLF time mark conspicuous timing indexicals (378). He works with already-substantivized times: namely "disposable" or "superfluous" (377, 384), "unlimited" (384), artificial and natural (393). Individually, none of these poses problems if we readily grasp Marxist temporal predicates. Taken together, they produce strange formulations of key NLF innovations, such as the "diversion" of "superfluous time" or "wast[ing] free time" in "infinite amounts" (378, 383). Yet these innovations made the periods between combat *indispensable* to the revolutionary effort rather than *disposable*, highlighting discursive traps set by reified master concepts of time that are impertinent to new situations. Timing theory and the idea of *re-timing* avoids this, encouraging comparative and dynamic rather than reductive and static analysis.

theorists posit that social agents maintain identity by self-reflexively monitoring actions *vis-à-vis* autobiographical narratives (Steele 2008, 17–18). Critical psychoanalytic researchers stress the “desire” for identity stability, derived from “the subject’s ‘lack’—of never fully being temporally or discursively present” and expressed through “identification practices” like robust “fantasy” and retroactive meaning-making (Solomon 2014, 672–77). Poststructuralists argue that “encircling” traumatic events preserves their original unintelligibility and prevents political subjects from being “re-inscribed,” “remembered/forgotten,” and “normalised” in “linear” state narratives, which “claim” such betrayals as heroic, necessary sacrifices (Edkins 2003, 95, 9).

These literatures foreground the importance of time but locate social selves apart from it. They tend to understand identity as a process that must cohere *over* time, *confront* its destabilizing essence, or *disrupt* its linear strictures. These characterizations offer up timing indexicals, the “tells” suggestive of underlying timing practices. Indeed, we can usefully reformulate these accounts. Instead of exploring how identity emerges “in time,” to be secured “over” or “through” it, we can explore how *identity itself constitutes a timing project*, an effort to synthesize oneself *out of* or *with* a variety of experiences, environmental changes, and other timing agents. Core identity commitments provide the timing standard (Hom and Solomon 2016, 24), often couched in terms of a dominant role or the main theme of a self’s autobiography (Carr 1986, 75–78). This standard tells us how to relate to others and how to negotiate dynamic and novel situations in order to (re)produce not only a coherent sense of self but *a stable sense of time*—a notion that our dynamic world is unfolding manageably (see Hom and Solomon 2016, 26–27; Edkins 2003, 4; Pratt 2017, 78). “Temporally decentered” social agents “stitch” across different times precisely because they labor to time their selves (Solomon 2014, 671–75). When successful, they gain not only a temporary sense of wholeness but also of “being present” (Solomon 2014, 675), of holding tenable connections to a “durable social arrangement” (Pratt 2017, 81; Elias 2007, 31).

Who we think we are is inextricably bound up with *when* we think we are. Discussions of identity “through” or “over” time obscure this all too easily because they implicitly frame time as the pre-constituted ground for identity construction. Timing offers us a more fraught picture of identity than critical and constructivist accounts. An insecure sense of self produces anxiety, but unanswered questions about that self’s relationship with its broader environment—or that environment’s cohesiveness—disturb us even more thoroughly. To

assuage our anxieties about both identity and time, we require not only self-consistent action but also the constant, laborious work of synthesizing an intelligible temporal whole from a welter of changes. This is a matter of sheer process-relational workload. The subject's incompleteness or "lack" reflects the timing demand of constantly relating oneself to a dynamic environment. Similarly, shame, critical situations (Steele 2008, 12–13), and trauma denote timing breakdowns—instances when our constitutive relations dissolve or produce such "a mismatch between expectation and event" as to announce a rupture and unspeakable "betrayal" (Edkins 2003, 8–9). By focusing on the timing self instead of identity in or through time, we recover these intrinsic links and tensions between social selves and the "broader transactional context[s], out of which actors *and their worlds emerge*" (Pratt 2017, 83, emphasis added).

Timing theory's resistance to intuitive but limited master concepts further sharpens the critical edge of identity research. For example, Jenny Edkins' account of state time vs. trauma time deploys a familiar linear-cyclical binary. The nation-state partakes of linear time, which "gentrifies" and "depoliticises" traumatic experience in a settled story of heroic sacrifice (Edkins 2003, 15). Resisting this sovereign power involves "*encircling the trauma* ... 'again and again'" to "surround" its "absence," prevent its reinscription in "linear time," and ultimately leave "open a space for a genuine political challenge" (Edkins 2003, 15–16).

Edkins' dependence on this master temporal binary limits her otherwise compelling analysis. It makes linear time seem like the primary source of sovereign power and continuity (Edkins 2003, 95). This in turn invests encirclement with radical appeal. Yet Edkins overlooks the stabilizing and pacifying potential of cyclical temporalities (see Gunnell 1987, 110–24). Alongside heroic histories, states also synthesize collective identity with calendrical cycles (Callahan 2006, 397; Hom 2017, 447), which dictate work and leisure patterns and set national holidays for particular historical events. Combined with clock-based notions of efficiency and punctuality (see O'Malley 1990, 145–48), calendrical cycles provide a passive and self-propagating timing regime that unfolds the life and times of the nation. Moreover, "returning" to traumatic sites "again and again" *might* keep their meaning unsettled. But return might also become a routine in its own *rite*, a custom absorbing trauma survivors in a normalized rhythm that becomes *a form of silence* rather than political voice.

For example, for several years the town of Royal Wootton Bassett (RWB) witnessed processions of returning dead British military personnel. This included no fanfare, few overt displays of nationalism, and staunch resistance to wider publicity (see Whetham 2017, 183–86). Instead, councilors stopped the town clock from tolling and residents somberly observed the passing of state corpses (Whetham 2017, 178). Witnesses and grieving families at RWB thus encircled the traumas and surrounded the absences caused by British military intervention again and again. Yet by becoming part of RWB’s daily life and rebuffing explicit politicization, they also gentrified trauma in a sense. Their silent witness became part of the rhythm of low-intensity war-fighting. Thus RWB’s cyclical practices reinforced sovereign state timing, not through heroic narrative but by *routinizing* traumatic loss as a quotidian quotient of British identity. This episode reinforces the fact that states time citizens in a variety of ways—linear, cyclical, and otherwise. This makes resistance very difficult but not impossible. It also suggests that we move beyond binary metaphors to better explore trauma’s *active* potential to disrupt the state’s multifaceted, *passive* timing regimes without risking self-pacification. As with war, timing theory enriches our understanding of trauma and identity by exposing their constitutive links to timing practices and conflicts.

### Conclusion

International-relations theory today benefits from a more expansive view of time, but the field remains constrained by habits that undermine its analysis of time and undersell time’s importance to international politics. Timing theory helps resolve these issues. Its dynamic framework—based in practical, processual, and political relations rather than given and static concepts—provides a better way to explain time’s emergence and operation. Timing offers heuristic resources for developing rigorous and systematic accounts of temporal phenomena. And it augments our knowledge of core issues like war and identity, showing how they often hinge on matters of timing.

Additionally, timing theory can imbue three emerging international-relations research areas with dynamism and contingency. First, as noted, pragmatist accounts of social life show how various processes and forms of relations produce the ‘stuff’ of international politics (Avant 2006, 515-20; 2016, 330-33; Goddard 2009, 250; Jackson and Nexon 1999, 313-17; McCourt 2016, 481). However, much of this work emphasizes relations over processes. We can see this in the prevalence of network analysis, a spatial and somewhat static brand of process-relationalism (see McCourt 2016, 480). Timing theory helps us put the process back in these



relations by highlighting their fluidity, provisionality, and dependence on willful effort. Moreover, the active-passive timing spectrum can help us clarify how relational processes become institutionalized or sediment into visualizable networks.

Second, historical sociological work applies Elias's ideas to long-term developments (for example, Górnicka, Liston, and Mennell 2015; Heinrich 2013; Linklater 2016; Towns 2009, 692-99) and to key international-relations concepts (Lacassagne 2012; Wickham and Evers 2012). This literature barely addresses Elias' ideas about timing. So while it foregrounds the diachronic sense of things changing "over time", it cannot draw out the causal or constitutive sense of how temporal factors drive political outcomes.<sup>18</sup>

Third, timing theory joins interpretivist efforts to accommodate the "fundamental temporality" of social life. But, importantly, it does so without the roundabout moves of detaching meanings from practices, objectifying them, and then "historicizing" them, all so they "lose their temporality and locality" to become legitimate analytical objects (Pouliot 2007, 366-68). Timing theory works much more directly. It allows scholars to dig beneath timing indexicals to discover relation-building efforts and their practical and symbolic history. This brings history and theory together, constructing a dynamic theory of times from the pragmatic genealogies of various temporal symbols.

Timing theory thereby problematizes deeply entrenched habits of speaking and thinking about time and begins to reconstruct our temporal imagination. Earlier I scrutinized analyses of identity "over/in/through" time. Timing theory's emphasis on positionality and will encourages scholars to pay this sort of attention to *all* such temporal claims. This opens up wide-ranging subfields like historical institutionalism, longitudinal statistics, and the English School to questions about what assumptions and perspectives inform our analytical deployments of "time."

Finally, timing theory broaches the self-reflexive move of treating international-relations theories and explanations as efforts to *re-time* politics, replete with underlying timing standards, wills to time, and particular positions and purposes.<sup>19</sup> This marks the first step toward working through the idea of international-relations as a political timing project in its

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<sup>18</sup> Similarly, discussions of Elias' work on timing ignore politics (for example, Tabboni 2001).

<sup>19</sup> For example, see Hom (2016, 176-78; 2017, 450-52).

own right—a collection of efforts to render change continua intelligible, establish relations between them, and anticipate how they can and should unfold. That is, timing helps clarify and connect the many times of international political practice and theory, while also calling for a disclosure of our own disciplinary timing commitments.

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